

Written Evidence submitted by Northumberland County Council (TPW0034)

Creating new, natural environments that our children, families, communities, businesses, climate and wildlife will cherish and benefit from for decades to come is the principle driver for Northumberland to plant forests and woodlands.

We wish to leave a better, more diverse, and more productive natural environment for future generations which can be sustained.

Please find some comments and thoughts to the question raised in this inquiry.

1. The Government is committed to plant 30,000 hectares of trees a year across the UK by 2025, the target should be flexible to meet the recommendations of the Climate Change Committee to ensure the ambition meets the need for net zero alignment. The target should be reviewed annually when emission calculations are published and considering the capacity of renewable energy generation being met in full or part. The progression of decarbonisation of heat could also be an indicator of the targets, so net zero is always considered and tree coverage becomes an integral part of action.
2. Whilst there are grants, funding and other income streams to help forest creation the length of process, the cash flow requirements, the level of strategic and time management and the comparable income opportunities from either subsidy or commercial land use makes investment decisions difficult and seen as a risk by landowners. A clearer understanding of the financial certainty of forest creation, particularly considering Brexit and the new ELM is needed. This was pivotal when developing renewable Energy markets with feed in tariffs, with renewable heats and would allow for increased confidence that planting was an assured change of land use that not only aided in the effort to meet net zero and assist nature recovery, but also was a financially sustainable move. More streamlined management delivered more quickly (providing quality standards and planning were still met by the landowner) would see a structure which could better support the targets set by Government. This is needed more now than previously by the public interest in afforestation and reforestation and their understandable benefits to climate and nature and well-being.
3. This is not an area we are able to fully reply on.
4. One area of past planting was the financial incentive to plant nonnative commercial forests which impacted on nature or sections of nature which made them attractive to a select number of people as visitors and species. This led to commercial forests rather than the right trees in the right places for the right reasons, a whole approach was not considered deeply enough.

5. Mitigating or adapting to climate change should be one of the top priorities when it comes to increasing forest cover. Planting trees is a natural way of removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it underground. With the aim of achieving net zero by 2050, planting more trees will help sequester existing emissions. It is also important to increase forest cover for biodiversity. With so much woodland being lost for human prosperity for infrastructure and fuel, it is often disregarded as an important habitat for flora and fauna. Increasing biodiversity will have even more positive benefits on the wider environment. Improving the air quality and rising biodiversity levels will also mean a positive effect on our health and wellbeing. With COVID-19 showing how important outdoor recreation, green spaces and nature is, it is now more than ever, that more trees should be planted to ensure that future generations learn the importance of protecting natural heritage.

6. With the current BPS in place, farmers may be less inclined to use their land to plant trees. With the ELMs scheme due to replace it, this may see a shift in land use patterns as the 'public goods for public money' approach begins to take shape.

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